

Lecture:

Neorealism

Neorealism represents a variation of classic realism. The neorealist emphasizes the importance of the structure of the international system, and the position or the location of the state in it. However, the neorealist has been criticized for ignoring the attributes or the internal characteristics of states in the international system. (For data on the attributes of individual states, see the [CIA World Factbook](#)) To the neorealist, it is not the internal attributes of the state that explain such factors as foreign policy behavior and the causes of war, but the distribution of power in the overall international system.

The two basic models of the distribution of power in the international system are bipolar and multipolar. The bipolar model was the classic Cold War model, in which power was clustered around the two competitive superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The multipolar model is one in which there are usually about five centers of power. To neo-realists, like Kenneth Waltz, bipolar systems are more stable and predictable than multipolar systems. Neorealists argue that the bipolar distribution of power during the Cold War avoided World War III, while the multipolar system which existed at the end of the 19th century (the five centers of power comprising the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia) collapsed, resulting in World War I.

The Long Peace(1815-1914)

The roots of the modern international system can be traced back to the imposition of a "Eurocentric" sense of order on the rest of international society during the era of western colonialism and imperialism. The international system which was created at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, lasted for nearly a century, and finally collapsed with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Of course, there were major turning points during this period, which signified that realignments of power were underway. Realignments of power eventually have consequences for the stability of an entire international system.

Anarchy

The international system has often been described as anarchic by the classic realist. The anarchic nature of the international system has been compared to Thomas Hobbes' depiction of the condition of man in the state of nature. Thomas Hobbes was a Seventeenth Century British philosopher, who argued that man's life in the state of nature was violent, in which his very physical security was constantly threatened, because a government did not exist to protect him. In other words, a state of nature is a state of existence, which is characterized by a "perpetual condition of warfare" of "each against all", because there is no governmental authority or "Leviathan" or sovereign entity to provide protection. Realists compare the international system to the Hobbesian state of nature, because there is no world government to provide security. Therefore, states face a security dilemma in an anarchic world in which they must rely on self-help to protect themselves.

National Sovereignty



The classic realist also believes that the international system is state-centric, in which the state is considered to be the sovereign actor. The origins of the state-centric system can be traced back to the 17th century, when the foundations of the modern European state system were supposed to have emerged. The Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years (1618-1648) War in Europe, legitimized the state as a sovereign actor in the world political system.

The notion of national sovereignty at the time meant that the secular ruler of a society wielded effective power over a particular piece of territory. The ruler was supposed to determine the religion of the ruled. Moreover, the state and nation were identified with the person of the ruler, which could be summed up in the phrase, "l'etat c'est moi." The Treaty of Westphalia undermined the medieval universalist principle of rule by the archaic Holy Roman Empire, and established the legitimacy of the state as an actor in the international system.

Jean Bodin

The French political theorist, Jean Bodin, developed a notion of sovereignty in 1576, which can be divided into two parts: (1) internal sovereignty (2) external sovereignty. Internal sovereignty means that a government should maintain effective control over a territory which it claims as its own. Furthermore, the state consists of a group of people living within a clearly defined territory which considers their government as legitimate. The traditional concept of sovereignty is based on the notion that the state is free to do whatever it wants to in its own territory.

External Sovereignty

The concept of external sovereignty is based on the idea that every state is equal to every other state in the international system. External sovereignty can be a legal fiction in some cases. For example, the principle of sovereign equality is enshrined in article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations. This means that such micro-states as Western Samoa or Dominica, have the same vote as China in the General Assembly of the United Nations. However, external sovereignty is a legal fiction because of the enormous variation in the real power capabilities of states in the world political system.

The Balance of Power

Realists believe that international order can be maintained by the balance of power, and when the balance of power breaks down, the result is war. The idea of the balance of power is itself a rather ambiguous concept, and can have several different meanings. It can mean an equal distribution of power between two or more competing states or blocs or alliances. It can also mean a situation in which one state or alliance is actually more powerful than a rival state or alliance. Finally, it can also describe a specific historical period which existed, such as the Long Peace that stretched from 1815 to 1914.

The balance of power is also maintained by a "balancer", a state which swings its weight back and forth on the scales of power in a disinterested fashion in order to maintain an equilibrium which is favorable to its own interests. For example, Britain supposedly played the role of "balancer" for centuries, switching back and forth between Continental alliance systems, in order to prevent hostile powers from gaining control of the North Atlantic seaboard facing England.

Hegemonic Stability Theory



Critics of the idea of the balance of power maintain that international order and peace is provided by a single hegemon, or dominant power in the international system. According to this theory, there are cycles of world leadership in which hegemony maintains international order, such as the United Kingdom in the 19th century, and the United States in the 20th century. The end of the Cold War has meant that the U.S. is the only remaining superpower, or even a hyperpower, enjoying a unipolar moment of global domination in history.

Critique of Realism

Realism attaches a minimum amount of importance to interstate cooperation, in the sense that it does not seem to recognize that states can maintain peace by "learning" to cooperate with one another. The utility of realism as a model for explaining international relations is questioned by political scientists who prefer a more empirical and quantitative approach to the study of international relations. They view realism as too impressionistic, and fault it for not placing enough emphasis on reaching conclusions based on observations drawn from the empirical study of human behavior and carefully tested data and hypotheses. For instance, the classic realist approach was criticized for not paying enough attention to the work of social psychologists, and what could be learned from human behavior by studying cooperation and conflict between individuals.

Realism too one-dimensional

Realism was also faulted for being one-dimensional in the sense that it exclusively focused on power relations between states and did not pay enough attention to the role of non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations (like the UN) and multinational corporations. Realism also did not pay enough attention to the role of ideology, religion, the international political economy, and "soft power". "Soft power" refers to such factors as the culture and the way of life of a society like the United States, which in an age of globalization, has spread over the planet, and sometimes has stimulated a backlash, such as Islamic fundamentalism.

Black Box too simplistic

Furthermore, critics (see John A. Vasquez, [The Power of Power Politics](#) (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983)) argued that realism did not present an accurate picture of the foreign policy decision-making process in the state. Realists depicted foreign policy decision-making as taking place in a "black box", in which the state was presented as a holistic, impenetrable entity. Realists failed to take into account the role of domestic factors in foreign policy-making, such as regime type and system (whether democratic or non-democratic), the role of political parties and interest groups, and the bargaining which takes place between large bureaucracies (such as the State Department, Treasury Department, Defense Department, and the CIA) in a country like the U.S., which results in foreign policy outcomes which often are based on the lowest common denominator.

Democratic Peace Theory

To the realist, there was no difference between the foreign policy of a democratic or totalitarian state. On the other hand, democratic peace theorists argue that the foreign policies of democracies differ from non-democracies. Liberal democracies tend to be more peaceful and less

prone to waging war against other liberal democracies. Therefore, the path to a peaceful world order is through the expansion of the zone of democracy which will result in an expansion of the zone of peace throughout the world. (for ratings of which states are considered democratic, see [Freedom House](#)) Liberal democracies tend to be less war-prone because of the restraining influence of public opinion. Liberal democracies tend to be more economically interdependent, therefore further reducing the amount of warfare that occurs between them. Critics of democratic peace theory argue that it is based on too few case studies. Furthermore, there have been instances of democracies waging war against each other.

Too Rational?

Critics of realism also argue that it places too much emphasis on the idea that leaders of states make their foreign policy decisions in a rational fashion. Behavioral studies have discovered a great deal of evidence that political elites may also make irrational foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, realism does not pay enough attention in analyzing the world views and world images of foreign policy elites. Such factors as stereotyping and cognitive dissonance are especially critical in foreign policy decision-making as elites often find themselves overloaded with information and under enormous pressure to act in a crisis situation in a very short period of time.

International Regimes

Moreover, the world may not be quite as anarchic as the realists depict. **Neo-liberal institutionalists** believe that international regimes, based on organizations and rules, have evolved to help the world deal with common problems with International financial institutions, such as the [International Monetary Fund](#). International regimes also deal with international trade, efforts to manage the oceans and to protect the environment. Idealists believe that institutions make a difference in providing a framework in which states can learn to cooperate with one another.

Idealism

Idealism is more prevalent after a "Great War" and usually places the fate of world order in the hands of international morality and ethics. The idealist emphasizes the codification of international law to protect human rights (see [Human Rights Watch](#)) from a universal perspective, which includes civil, political, economic and social rights.

Moreover, a new doctrine of **humanitarian intervention** has developed in the post Cold War world in which the international community maintains the right to intervene in a state where gross and massive human rights violations are occurring. However, it should be pointed out that the notion of what constitutes the "international community", is itself somewhat nebulous. Often, Great Powers like the United States purport to speak for the international community, while others would identify the international community with the United Nations. Others would argue that the international community consists of a set of universal values and norms. Idealists also emphasize the role of international organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security. The notion of **collective security** is also very important to the idealist approach to world order, which will be more fully discussed in the section



dealing with the United Nations. In the final analysis, the idealist has a more optimistic view of human nature than the realist, advocates democratic peace theory, and believes that non-state actors also play an important role in world politics.